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The Collector and Art Critic

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE ARTS AND CRAFTS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, ETC.

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INDIANAPOLIS, Ind., Feb. 21, 1905.

To the Editor of THE COLLECTOR AND ART CRITIC.

DEAR SIR: I am in receipt of both your circular and the first number of the revived "Collector and Art Critic." I send you herewith my subscription for the coming year. I want to congratulate you on the reappearance of this valuable paper, and to express the hope that its revival be permanent. It filled a place that no other publication of the kind has ever occupied, and a place that surely needs to be filled. When you ceased publishing a few years ago I felt lost at its absence and have felt so ever since, so you can imagine how welcome to me the magazine is—like the return of an old and well-loved friend.

I hope that you will continue to follow up your plan of campaign for all that is sincere and worthy in art, handling without gloves, as you have always done, the frauds and fakes and impositions that make the old schools especially a happy hunting-ground for all the rascals and cheats of the art world. Especially do I hope to see you continue your work for what is good and sincere in American art, for against the plunderers we need all the help we can get if we are to live and do our best.

A long life, a big subscription list and success to the new venture.

Yours, with best wishes,

* * *

I may be allowed to submit this letter, out of many of the same tenor that have been received, and to pledge myself to carry out its sentiments to the letter.

W. F.

THE BOSTON "VELASQUEZ."

I.

The painting, acquired by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, through Dr. Denman Ross, has aroused no end of discussion. It is said to represent Philip IV. of Spain and to have been painted by Velasquez. Its authenticity has been assailed in various quarters, and the controversy, ranging from amiable to acrid, is one of supreme interest to the art world. The subject of the expertising of paintings has come prominently to the fore.

Expertism is a serious thing. To be an expert requires the work of a lifetime, nor can any one even then lay claim to the knowledge that will cover the whole field.

It was Sir Joshua Reynolds, I believe, who once said that the man who was able to pass judgment on a great work of art at first sight was a shallow charlatan. What, then, must be said of the man who in all-embracing confidence lays claim to expertship in every school and is ready to deliver a written opinion (on receipt of a fee) on any picture submitted to him?

Yet there are dozens of striplings, fresh from Julian's or the Beaux-Arts who, after a few years of copying in the Louvre, will tell you that they know all about the Old Masters. And even hide-bound old painters, reminiscent of their early student days, will claim to be the arbiters of a painting's authenticity, and with airy persiflage and reckless and ignorant remarks they will hold forth and display their innocuous imbecility. The paucity of their reasons when asked for analysis is usually commensurate with their pretensions.

A man with a fund of information that has cost him the labor of many years' careful observation is very conservative in his expertship.

An expert on any one painter should know that painter in all his manners, from his start to his finish, his different periods and styles and experiments. Then he can branch out and take other painters of the same school, or principal men of different schools. But a lifetime would be too short to acquire the knowledge to expertise, say: a Brouwer, a Nattier and a Luino.

It is easy, even for the layman, to understand modern painters. Even the Barbizon men of comparative recent art history may be readily recognized, for their theories and practices of glazings and under glazings and direct painting, their individual color, drawing, and brush handling are so well known that many can differentiate between the real and the bogus.

The science of expertising the older masters is, however, more difficult and only of recent origin. Morelli, the great Italian expert, may be considered the chief promoter of the new objective school of expertism. He pointed out the need of allowing the painting to speak for itself and the absolute folly of giving too much importance to pedigree or "provenance," so called; the greater value of following forms and certain mannerisms and characteristics in drawing. He went through the principal museums and restored many pictures to their proper places, notably in Hampton Court. The "Reading Magdalene" in Dresden he gave to a later artist and not

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to Correggio. The "Madonna and Child with Angels" in the Uffizzi Gallery, so long attributed to Titian, he restored to Correggio, although a pedigree of 150 years had given it to the Venetian master. Yet he had the largeness of mind to admit mistakes, for I might well say right here that there is not an expert in Europe or America to-day who is in accord with every other expert of equal ability and reputation on the genuineness of some one or other work, from Leonardo to Israels. Still the science has developed to more or less accuracy, principally through the writings of such men as Fromentin, Bernhard Berenson, Sir Walter Armstrong, R. A. M. Stevenson, George Moore, Dr. Bredius, Hofstede de Groot, Dr. Bode, and Crowe and Cavalcaselle.

* * *

The expert, then, approaches the authentic works of a painter and tries to discover what habits have become so rooted in the artist as to be unconscious, and under what influences he formed them—the training of a painter being altogether a training in habits of attention, visualization and execution. Details must be noted, and singled out if constantly recurring, to yield the best clue to a master's characteristics. These details are the ears, the hands, the ringlets of hair, the manner of painting the eye, certain constantly recurring bits of landscape or settings of background, certain awkwardness of attitude or idiosyncrasies of pose, and especially the folds of drapery and clothing. These details were prone to being executed in a stereotyped fashion because least attracting the habit of attention of the artist, which would be more likely to be centred on the expression of the face.

Thus analyzing, the expert will look in a work by Raphaël for purity of line, luminosity of shadows, the losing of the finger-tips in the shadows. In Titian he discovers the inverted V shape in the draperies and the exaggerated outer curve of the base of the thumb. In Rubens he sees the colors of a rich palette, the glazings, the fertile imagination of the composition, the crisp expression, the transparency of the shadows. In Rembrandt again the warm undertones, the marvelous lighting, the facile touch.

And yet the artist does not become to the expert a botanical but a psychological problem, for habits of feeling and thinking and physical reasons may intervene which must be considered in accrediting an unknown work to whom it belongs.

For instance, there are right-handed Wyants and left-handed Wyants and cigarette ash Wyants—yet all Wyants. And I have seen a little sketch accredited to George Inness, most unlike his finished work, which I still consider for various reasons to be by the master—only it appears to me to have been a color experiment.

* * *

The signature on a painting is of very little value. Its forging is surely easier than the copying of an original. Many old pictures are unsigned, because they had the signature on the frames, which are lost; or the signature being put on last and over the varnish it was the first to disappear in cleaning. Many of the greatest painters rarely signed their works, notably Velasquez, Rubens, Zurbaran, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Lawrence, Turner. Unless a painting is "signed all over," the name adds little value.

Nor is the "provenance," the pedigree, the history of a painting to be accredited much weight. A provenance may be manufactured. One of the oldest swindles is the forging of letters, seals and bills of sale to go with a painting. Many of the world's finest masterpieces have no provenance. The disrepute into which the Old Masters fell in the middle of the last century under the influence of French classicism has destroyed much documentary evidence. In that period old paintings brought ridiculous prices at auction. At the Duke of Buckingham's great sale in 1848 we find Rembrandt's

"The Standard Bearer" bringing only £54, and portraits by Frans Hals, now worth thousands, fetched a few pounds each. In consequence small pains were taken to preserve records and thousands of genuine paintings have come to us to-day with their provenance completely obliterated.

In fact, one of the largest dealers in Paris told me once that he was inclined to be suspicious of those works offered for sale when great stress was laid on the record. Empty form, vacuous color, unskillful construction, a clumsy touch will not be changed or ennobled by documents.

* * *

The Boston "Velasquez" has been subjected to much critical examination. Its provenance is delivered by the gentleman who sold the picture, but his antecedents do not conduce to confidence in the tale that is told.

Mrs. Neena H. Pringsheim, who is said to be an ardent student of Velasquez, has assailed the authenticity of the painting in a monograph containing various inaccuracies which make it scarcely of value for severe critical consideration.

Various art dealers and critics abroad impugn the painting with some show of reasoning. And a committee selected by the Museum authorities, consisting principally of painters who have copied Velasquez in the Prado, are enthusiastic in asseverating its genuine origin from the master's hand.

The painting must speak for itself, and must have the last word.

* * *

Before we look at the painting, let us know what to look for to give it its proper place. And as the question is on its Velasquez authorship, what do we know of Velasquez?

Velasquez's device in art was *Verdad no pintura*, truth not painting—yet, Luca Giordano called his work "the theology of painting." If theology means supreme knowledge, the appellation is apt.

The two periods of the Master's painting are divided by his first Italian journey in 1630. But even in his first period the vital creative power emerges, not the result of mere imitative observation but native breadth and dignity in treatment, massive and secure in construction. In his second period there is an added lightness, unity and force of tone, a more decorative character and an increase of atmospheric effect. Yet had he died during his first visit to Rome it might have been said, without absurdity, that he had said his last word and that, young as he was, he had lived to see his art fully ripened.

Throughout his work we find that often he had no real sense of color, the more surprising when we remember the unfailing instinct for color shown by his Moorish contiguity. His drawing was always admirable, correct and unrestrained; some of his portraits are modelled very broadly and softly, without a sharp mark or a hard edge, when he smudges so subtly as to convey no sense of direct handling; the surfaces slide into each other in a loose, supple manner. Or again he gave his figures bold, rough-hewn planes, which give them the force and vigor of firm chiselling.

Velasquez had a mastery over his materials unequalled, his coloring was clear and clean, he seldom used mixed tints. He was gifted with the art of simplification, with an economy of pigment, whereby the texture of the canvas becomes visible, enhancing the delicate effect. He husbanded his whites and even his yellows, which tell, sparkling like gold, on his under-toned backgrounds. He painted with a rapid, flowing and certain brush, using those long ones of which Palomino speaks.

Velasquez was the great discoverer of values, that is, according the just amount of light to the color represented, which gives an object painted a peculiar intensity of illumination and appearance of life; while his power of painting cir-

cumambient air, his knowledge of lineal and aerial perspective, and the gradations of his tones, give an absolute concavity to the flat surface of the canvas.

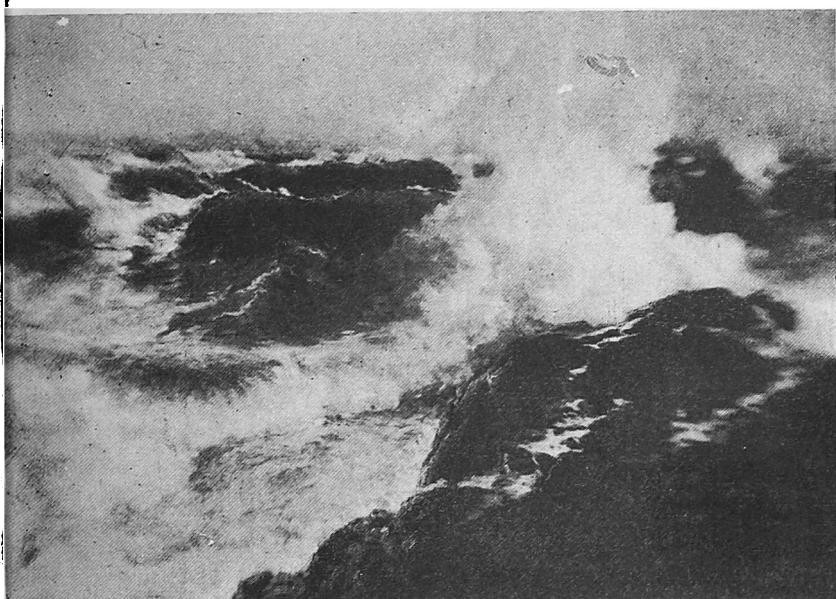
Yet in all his painting there is an absence of art and effort, which is the culmination of knowing how to do a thing. This was the result of his severe discipline in the studios of his masters, Francisco de Herrera and Francisco Pacheco.

Par excellence, Velasquez was an objective painter. His work is free from the slightest tendency to substitute cleverness for truth. He never frittered away his breadth or sympathetic effect by superfluous finish to mere accessories. He never "faked." He did everything bravely, with an utter absence of self-assertion or pose. There is no showing of the artist. The idea never enters his head that his own individual trick with the brush could have an interest for any human being.

These are the characteristics of Velasquez to be borne in mind when examining the Boston painting.

* * *

In the next number the painting itself will be discussed.



GEORGE H. McCORD.

"THE LEDGE OF BASS ROCKS." IN THE AMBROSE PETRY COLLECTION,
DETROIT, MICH.

George H. McCord is a standby. His work becomes more commanding with the years. "The Ledge of Bass Rocks" now in the Ambrose Petry private collection in Detroit and on exhibition at the Museum there, is a wonderfully strong presentation of the giant battle between solid and fluid matter. You hear the thunderous boom and the roar of the mountainous wave breaking under giant pressure upon the rocks; and you see the glittering ridge of a transparent sea in the distance. It is a blit, pelting, foaming amphitheatre, with the high spray and rushing snow of the surges choppingsharp down into the livid vortex and making it flash up in white spume that smothers the ledge like the smoking spray of a great waterfall. What wonderful wave formation, masses of scud—torn, ragged, tendril shaped—with emerald billows, chipped by the keen teeth of the wind into diamond flashings, seething tracks of foam. McCord does not always paint his luminous and lurid skies, but bytimes finds his inspiration express a feeling of grandeur and sublimity.

A SUGGESTION TO THE NEW DIRECTOR OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.

Art has no nationality, but given a certain environment there is very likely to develop a tendency toward the expression of more or less local and native aspects. We have of late years heard a great deal of talk about American landscape art, and some of it has not been without honor even in the art marts of the Old World. It might be an interesting if not a specially profitable task to carefully search into the training of some of the men who have done more than others to give distinction to the art that we have grown to speak of as American. The fact that their inspiration and almost their entire technical equipment have been found in their own country would at least have some significance for the ardent patriot.

Inness, Wyant, Homer Martin, Winslow Homer are names that stand out with special insistence in our art annals, and they form a group as distinctly native as we can think of anywhere in contemporary painting. Their work has been individual in a marked degree, and representative of the best achievement of our time, and, luckily for our future, they have a worthy group of followers.

What we need just now more than anything else is some generally recognized appreciation of the fact that we *have* achieved the distinction of a native art; or rather of the fact that our painters have arrived at a point where their art is worthy the public acknowledgment that would be best expressed in a particular gallery devoted exclusively to their own work.

There is a fine nucleus for such a collection already hung in various rooms of the Metropolitan Museum, and it would be a most gracious act on the part of the management to begin the new régime by setting them apart, where they might, with others, be judged as a single and particular exhibit. Such a gallery would afford opportunity for manifesting our increasing pride in the occasional achievement of something besides Beef Trusts, Standard Oil monopolies and high buildings, and might in time, possibly, have a pleasant and wholesome effect upon the spirits and work of the men who have too often had to look for recognition beyond their own shores.

Let us have a permanent exhibition of American paintings. I dare say that it would afford a most agreeable surprise to those lovers of art who have filled their private galleries with examples by foreign artists, chiefly because they are foreign.

The only possible objection I can see to such a setting apart would be its almost inevitable effect upon prices. From the collector's point of view it might not, strictly speaking, be considered "good business." But isn't it time that we recognized that a worthy painting by even an American is worth a fair return for the time, labor and special genius that go to its making?

JAMES B. CARRINGTON.

Some requests have come in for fresh copies of the Color Supplement of the last number, which can not be complied with owing to a disastrous fire at the printing establishment a few hours after the mail list of this magazine had gone to the Post Office.

The request is made to replace creased copies of the color-plate, owing to folding. The picture can, however, be straightened by mounting, when no creases will show—I have tried it myself.

Another matter. Sample copies will gladly be forwarded when the request is accompanied with fifteen cents in stamps, the price of the magazine.

The response in year's subscriptions after the first number was received, and even before, has been intensely gratifying. I would request all who desire to receive the paper